



Patriarchy and Women's Participation in Politics: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The gender gap in politics is a global phenomenon. Several socio-economic, political and cultural factors that are the direct or indirect result of patriarchal traditions are responsible for the exclusion of women in electoral politics. However, the patriarchal system is not directly noticeable in the government and politics of a country. This paper tries to explore whether patriarchy inhibits the participation of women in electoral politics across all countries and cultures considering Australia and Bangladesh as two cases. It is argued that patriarchy has given men a superior and advantageous position in politics while creating barriers to the greater participation of women in electoral politics.

Keywords: Women; Politics; Political participation; Patriarchy; Australia; Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Women are insignificant in all spheres of politics and more specifically in electoral politics where they have the scope to participate in the decision-making process. A wide body of literature on women and representation indicates that the number of women in politics has a positive impact regarding symbolic implications, policy ramifications and mobilization consequences (Beckwith, 2007). Additionally, Phillips (1991) argues that increasing women's participation in politics is important for three main reasons. First, it is a matter of justice – women should not be excluded from the central activities in politics as women make up more than 50% of the population and therefore should be equally present in any elected assemblies with men. Second, women bring a different set of values, experiences, and expertise to politics. The third argument is that men and women have opposing views, and it is absurd to think that men can represent women.

Over the years, the United Nations (UN) has initiated several efforts and programs to enhance women's participation in politics throughout the world. Unfortunately, worldwide, women are marginal in politics, and this is true regardless of the level of development within countries. On average, women occupy 24.5% of seats in national parliaments (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019). There is no country either developed or developing where women are represented in politics in proportion to their population. They are far away from achieving equality, particularly in the political sphere, with many of the barriers to women participating in politics still existing whether the country is considered developed or developing. Some of the barriers are similar across all countries and/or societies (for example, lack of family support, financial dependency and role of political party) while a few others (such as violence and lack of security) are specific to the socio-historical context of the countries. However, prima facie, it appears as if a common force that is patriarchy is responsible for the similarities of barriers to women irrespective of differences in the level of development and culture. This study is a modest attempt to examine whether patriarchy prevails in Australian and Bangladeshi society and thus impedes the participation of women in electoral politics.

2. Methodology

This paper follows a qualitative, comparative case-study approach. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with 24 women elected representatives in Australia and 20 female politicians in Bangladesh. In addition, the study is based on secondary sources like books, journals, reports, newspaper articles, and the Internet. The results from the field interviews indicate that in the two countries women deal with some common barriers. It raises the question of whether patriarchy might be a persistent force in presenting barriers to women's participation in politics despite socio-economic progress and some aspects of cultural and institutional liberalization.

3. Defining the Key Terms

3.1. Politics

The word 'politics' originates from the ancient Greek word 'polis' meaning 'city-state,' the form of political community in ancient Greece (Heyking, 2008). There is no universal definition of politics. Politics is viewed in various ways in different eras and across societies. Nevertheless, there are certain universal notions about the circumstances that give rise to politics. Randall (1987), recognizes politics as social, in that it has 'little meaning for the solitary inhabitant of a desert island.' She also asserts that politics arises when resources are scarce, and there are potential conflicts of interest or viewpoints regarding the distribution of resources. She suggests that in short, politics is how people influence the allocation of resources.

Adrian Leftwich (1984), states that politics lies at the heart of all collective social activity whether formal or informal, public or private, in all human groups, organizations, and societies. Heywood (2002), concludes that in its broadest sense, politics is the action in which individuals make, preserve and revise the general principles under which they live. Politics can be seen as the domain of government or as what concerns the state; as the conduct and administration of public undertakings; as the resolution of contention through debate and conversation; and as the generation, conveyance and utilization of resources over the span of social existence. Therefore, given these differing conceptions of politics, politics can be viewed as an activity, which includes both people's participation in public policies and the impact of policy-making upon them.

3.2. Political Participation

Like politics, the definition of political participation also varies. Parry *et al.* (1992), describe political participation as taking part in the making and implementation of public policies or actions with the aim to influence the viewpoints of policy-makers to subjects yet to be decided, or activities to challenge against the outcome of some decisions. Verba *et al.* (1995), describe political participation as the activity that has the intention of affecting government decision or activity. It may influence the formulation or execution of public policy or in some way affects the selection of individuals who make those policies. Therefore, political participation refers to the activity that influences the government either directly or indirectly.

Political participation matters a lot for women as a group and as individuals. Whether women work jointly to protest gender-based discriminations or whether they participate in non-gender-specific associations and struggles, the most important advantage of political participation is the ability to make policymakers responsive to their needs (Goetz, 2003). This paper focuses on the participation of women in electoral politics, as this is the area where women are currently facing their greatest impediment.

3.3. Patriarchy

Patriarchy is an ancient Greek word meaning 'the rule of the father.' Initially, the word was in use to mean the herding societies of the Old Testament where the father's authority and supremacy over family members were absolute (LeGates, 2001). Rich (1976), explains patriarchy as a cultural-familial, ideological, political system where men decide what women shall or shall not perform by force, or through ritual, conventions, law, language, etiquette, education, and the division of work.

Virginia Held (1993) asserts that patriarchy indicates the ubiquitous and structural nature of the supremacy of men over women in almost every aspect of life and society. Lerner (1986), argues that patriarchy, in general, means the manifestation and institutionalization of male-domination over women and children in the family and male supremacy over women in society on the whole. It suggests that 'men hold control in all the critical institutions of society' and that 'women are denied access to such power.' However, it does not imply that women are either totally powerless or entirely deprived of rights, influence, and resources.

In short, patriarchy depicts the institutionalized system of male supremacy. Patriarchy can be defined as an arrangement of social relations among men and women, which have a material base, and which, although hierarchical, set up or build autonomy and harmony among men that allow them to rule over women Jagger & Rosenberg, as cited in Sultana (2012). Patriarchal beliefs exaggerate the biological dissimilarities between males and females and extend it into socio-cultural domains, assuring that men always possess the dominating roles of controlling women. This philosophy is so powerful that men are for the most part able to secure the apparent assent of women they abuse through institutions like the academy, the church, and the family, each of which legitimizes and strengthens women's subordination to men (Millett, 1977).

Walby (1990), defines patriarchy as an arrangement of social structures and practices, in which men control, repress and abuse women. She stresses the use of the term social structures as it obviously implies refusal both of biological determinism and the belief that every individual male is in a prevailing position and every female in an inferior one. According to her, patriarchy is composed of six structures:

1. the patriarchal mode of production, which refers to the underestimated and unrecognized work of housewives who are expropriated by their husbands or partners;
2. patriarchal relations in paid work, which indicates the reality that normally women have been granted worse jobs that entail less expertise;
3. patriarchal relations in the state, which refer to the fact that the state is patriarchal, racist and capitalist and is prejudiced towards patriarchal interests;
4. male violence, which explains the ways men's aggression against women is systematically endured and tolerated by the state's denial to interfere against it;
5. patriarchal relations in sexuality, where the patriarchy has decided that heterosexuality is and should be the norm; and
6. patriarchal relations in cultural establishments as an arrangement of social structures and practices in which men dominate, abuse and oppress women, through diverse cultural organizations, such as, the media, education, and religion.

Therefore, patriarchy can be defined as a social system of male supremacy over females in all aspects of life where women are, on the whole, victimized, oppressed and exploited by men. Although with modernization and the rise of education, gender disparities are gradually declining, the traditional custom of confining women to the household, keeping women submissive to male authority, and discouraging them from taking a visible role in public life, remains pervasive though it varies in extent (Rocca *et al.*, 2009).

3.4. Elected Female Representatives in Australia and Bangladesh

The Commonwealth of Australia is a federation of six states: New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and Western Australia, along with two territories: Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory. National political organizations in Australia mirror the British legacy (Australia being a former British colony) and the impact of North American federalism. The party or coalition with the majority of seats on a preferred basis in the election in the lower house or House of Representatives (150 members) forms the government. Bills need to be approved by the Senate or the Upper House (consisting of 76 members, 12 from each of the six states and two from each of the mainland territories) to become Laws. At the federal level, the government normally rotates between the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and a coalition of the Liberal (LIB) and the Nationals (NAT). Other parties like the Green (GRN) and Independents regularly win seats in the Senate but seldom in the House of Representatives (McAllister, 2006).

The ALP has a 40:40:20 quota that guarantees that at least 40% of Labor seats are filled by women and a minimum of 40% by men. The rest may be filled by either gender (McAllister, 2006; McCann and Wilson, 2014). In Australia, the ALP has the highest share of women in parliament credited by many to the Labor's quota policy. The Coalition parties (LIB and NAT) do not have any quota system claiming that quotas are discriminatory towards men and the nomination of candidates should be based on merit (McAllister, 2006; McCann and Wilson, 2014). They argue that more women may get the opportunity to join electoral politics by mentoring, training and networking sessions (Drabsch, 2007).

The situation of women in national politics in Bangladesh is somewhat different from the Australian experience. The major political parties in Bangladesh are the Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jatiya Party (JP), and the Jamat-e-Islami (JI). Since 1990 either the AL or coalitions of the BNP and the Islamic fundamentalist party JI have been ruling the country. The Parliament of Bangladesh is a single chamber (unicameral), consisting of 300 directly elected members from single territorial constituencies through the 'first-past-the-post' system for a term of five years. In addition to 300 general members, there are 50 reserved seats for women in parliament who are elected by the elected general members of the parliament (Jahan and Kabir, 2012). General seats are more important than the reserved seats in terms of power and status.

The percentage of women in the parliament of Australia is 30.46% in the Lower House and 48.68% in the Senate and in Bangladesh 20.63% (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019). It indicates that regarding the share of women in parliament Australia is in a better position than Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the House of Representatives is generally considered the 'main game' in politics, as the government is formed in the Lower house. Women's participation in the Lower house is marginal.

The interviews with the participants explored several impediments to the political participation of women. All the participants identified the domestic role of women as one of the most critical barriers causing many women to join politics once their children are grown up. Entering politics late may hinder women's promotion and prospects to high positions of influence.

Lack of education is another barrier that impedes the political participation of women. While women on the whole in Australia do not face the problem, in Bangladesh, many girls do not get the opportunity to attend schools after the primary level. Lack of finance is another issue that women in general encounter. Women in both Australia and Bangladesh find it difficult to manage the huge amount of money required to vie in the national election. Additionally, harassment and bullying deter women from participating in politics in Australia and Bangladesh. Furthermore, political violence that is very common in Bangladesh and lack of security discourage many eligible and interested women to get involved in politics.

Politics is male-dominated. The legacy of male-domination results in lower interest and involvement of women in politics, which tends to be viewed as a 'man's domain.' Women in both countries have recognized the aggressive and masculine nature of politics and the lack of party support as major political hindrances to women.

The participants identified the traditional division of labor, peoples' attitudes towards women in society, and the socialization process as the most critical socio-ideological barriers to the political participation of women. Popular attitudes towards women's primary roles as mothers and homemakers all around the world restrict women from participating in the public sphere. In addition, the traditional gender roles and socialization cause low self-confidence among women that inhibit their participation in politics in both countries.

Moreover, religion plays a strong role in the lives of women in Bangladesh. Due to religious customs people in Bangladesh, in general, prefer women confined within the domestic spheres; women need to maintain a certain dress code, they are deprived of property rights that impede their entry into politics. In contrast, in Australia, the media plays a crucial role in shaping the political participation of women in federal politics. The media tends towards negative reporting about female politicians; focusing on their appearance and personal life in a way that male politicians are not subject of.

The obstacles to the political participation of women in Australia and Bangladesh are mostly alike except for a few differences related to the contrasting political and cultural contexts. It is found that family responsibilities, traditional gender roles, lack of resources, attitudes of broader society towards women, the aggressive nature of politics, and the chauvinistic attitudes of male colleagues present challenges to women when considering politics as a career. This implies that there is a set of common issues that transcends socio-cultural differences. Is it patriarchy that is the common force in the countries creating obstacles to the participation of women in electoral politics?

3.5. Is Australia a Patriarchal Society?

The status and position of women in society are closely embedded within the tradition/culture of that particular society. Several factors including the distance, isolation, the variations of weather, instabilities in the market for basic products, minor population, immigration, and limited resources have given a unique texture to Australian life and set problems for the Australian people that are exclusively their own. From the beginning, men in this region have outnumbered women, and a form of masculinity was imposed in society (MacKenzie, 1962). The settlers, who came to Australia as convicts, outcasts, Irish peasants, or diffident administrators, were mostly lacking in status and, according to Dixon (1999), self-esteem. Their psychological demands caused them to degrade women, as psychosomatic protection against their own insufficiency. Men disrespected women and often treated them with cruelty (Dixon, 1999). The severe conditions of the rural pioneering in Australia, therefore, restricted women to the family and the domestic spheres simply as workers and mothers (Encel and Campbell, 1991).

Society offered women few opportunities for service and outside interests; in their sexual relations, they were confined to a Christian/Victorian tradition which found something disgraceful in physical contentment, especially the females', and of a double standard, whereby more tolerance was given to male indiscretions in relationships than to women. The social customs and morals were male-oriented where women rationalized their recognition by conveying the flags of moralism and by professing revulsion with the persistent physical demands of men (Turner, 1968). It gives the impression that women showing interest to participate in public life were not desirable in the community during that time. This situation indicates a society of male-domination or patriarchy.

According to Mercer (1975), from the commencement of white settlement in Australia, women were brought out to satisfy the desires of men. Household and family were, and even now are, considered natural for women that they could perform as wives and mothers or domestic help. They are oppressed for their gender at homes, in the job market, in schools, in the church, and in politics. The lack of any cultural tradition that allows women to be something else acts as a significant barrier to female resistance and keeps women physically and emotionally obliged to their domestic duties (Summers, 2002).

From a feminist perspective, men in Australia designed the fundamental standard for the power structure pivoted around the sexual power relationship. Thus, although Australia is among the most developed industrial democracies in the world, the patriarchal system at the heart of that tradition shapes the function, character, and manpower of current politics and parliamentary politics (Dixon, 1999).

Violence against women is widespread in Australian society (Murdolo and Quiazon, 2016). In Australia, two in every five women (41%) have experienced violence since the age of 15 years. Around one in three (34%) has experienced physical violence and almost one in five (19%) has experienced sexual violence (Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2017).

Currently, women are in greater numbers participating in the workforce and pursuing careers in all professions. They have better access to contraception and abortion services. Laws have been enacted that attempt to create equal pay, equal opportunity and protect women from violence. More women are now completing university degrees than men. However, the popular expectations from women have not yet changed. Women are still considered as having primary responsibility for bringing up children. The rate of domestic violence against women and girls in Australia remains a serious issue. They are less likely to reach higher management positions. There is a gender pay gap. The available statistics and data on the participation of women in electoral politics in Australia show that federal and state parliament and local government are still by and large dominated by men; men lead the key decision-making areas.

Against such a background, politics in Australia supports the superior power of male players as well as being viewed most suitable to men. Therefore, politics not only discourages women from positions of power but also degrades the political activities where women participate (O'Flaherty, 2005). In Australia, all types of political activities were in the past, and to a considerable extent, still, are considered the absolute property of men. The political role that women are allowed is thus very restrictive; the small part women perform in politics simply reflects and results from the secondary place they are placed by the customs and attitudes of the society. Women are educated and socialized in such a way that they accept this status as normal, and conform to and even support the mindsets of those who most resist their political participation Duverger, as cited in, O'Flaherty (2005).

In addition, Australian society has a system of institutionalized male supremacy in which women are generally prohibited from influential positions in vital organizations. Although women are not absolutely powerless, an imbalance of power favors men. Women's opinions and presence are undervalued; they cannot play in parallel with men in politics. Regardless of the fact that women have benefited over time, with greater political representation, anti-discrimination laws, growing participation in the labor market and rising economic autonomy, the disparity of power between the sexes remains a basic characteristic of Australia society (Farrer, 1997).

Although women enjoy most of the civil rights in Australia, cultural and historical impediments continue to hinder their advancement to power; women are still struggling to conquer the steeper slopes of power (O'Flaherty, 2005). However, the anti-discrimination laws and affirmative action legislation have widened the prospects for women (Schaffer, 1988). Women are gradually breaking into the public sphere; some are now performing leading roles in politics. Nevertheless, the traditional male-dominated image of politics demands a lot from women that are quite difficult for women to meet. Subsequently, and despite the fact that women are formally on an equal footing with men, they are not equivalent to men in reality; disparity still persists between the sexes, particularly in the accomplishment of political rights (O'Flaherty, 2005).

Misogyny and double standards are prevalent in the political arena and act as a key barrier to women's participation and success in politics. Misogynist attitudes in the highest levels of government are prevalent. Thus, it is seen that Jamie Briggs, a cabinet minister was set down for sexist behavior, but no action other than that was

taken. Furthermore, he received support for his sexist and misogynist behavior from his male colleagues (Ellem, 2016).

Regardless of the precise mechanisms that sustain the status quo and the barriers that women face to becoming involved in politics, the fact is that gender inequity persists, making Australia fundamentally a patriarchal society in the sense that men disproportionately hold positions of political power in Australian society. The interview findings confirm that Australian female politicians are acutely aware of this state of affairs, and perceive their opportunities (and those of other women) to be undermined by the situation. In short, although the situation is historically improving, the gender imbalance remains problematic and is perceived by female politicians to be entrenched.

3.6. Is Bangladesh a Patriarchal Society?

The tradition and customs of Bangladesh, previously East Bengal and then East Pakistan, which became a sovereign nation in 1971, are shaped to a larger extent by its origin as East Bengal in India (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2013). The country shares two of the ancient and wealthiest social customs of the world. From one perspective, its roots go back to early Indic civilization and then again to Islamic culture. The crystallization of the Bengali language from the classical Sanskrit during the Indian medieval period furnished the area with a linguistic underpinning for its different social characters. Additionally, when the Muslim influence spread to Bengal, the territory already had a rich accumulation of Buddhist and Hindu cultures of no less than 1,500 years and a complete social structure centered on caste (Monsoor, 1999). Thus, although East Bengal was a Muslim-dominant region, it had close cultural links with West Bengal and with numerous features of the social customs of Hindu India, resulting in a combination of Bengali culture and Islamic beliefs (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2013).

In ancient India, Manu, the famous lawgiver lectured that women should never be independent; her father has authority over her as a child; her husband has authority over her as a youth; and in old age, her son has authority over her. The status of women in the family was set in the background of this patriarchal custom (Islam, 2000). The majority of the first converts to Islam and their successors, who were predominantly lower caste Hindus, did not surrender many of the local rituals and customs. Over the span of time, the interaction with the strong social tradition of new converts brought about new cultural adjustments that ultimately brought down women's status and slowly made them captives under men's commands (Monsoor, 1999).

The traditional culture, accompanied by religion, acts as a strong force in perpetuating the patriarchal system. Religion, in fact, was the basis of the country's establishment. In 1947, the British rulers and contemporary well-known political leaders of India divided the Indian sub-continent into two parts: India and Pakistan on the basis of religion (Falguni, 1995). However, the Muslim and Hindu customs were maintained even after the consolidation of East Bengal in the newly independent Pakistan in 1947 (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2013). Throughout the 1947-1971 period, in the East Pakistan era, which preceded the formation of Bangladesh, religion turned into an essential part of life and a prime determinant of women's social status (Falguni, 1995).

In 1971, the newly sovereign state, Bangladesh, proclaimed secularism as one of the fundamental principles of governing the country. That new era from 1972 seemed moderately liberal for women. However, two successive military coups, in 1975 and 1981, changed the situation. The first coup tried to de-secularize the country in 1977 by deleting the principle of secularism and substituted it with absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah. The second coup d'état in 1981 carried on the process and declared Islam as the state religion (Halder, 2004).

Today, Islam influences the society and politics of Bangladesh largely. For the majority Muslim population of Bangladesh, Islam plays a major role in shaping their everyday customs within society. The ideology of Islam determines the relations between men and women in Bangladesh. Women are oppressed through misinterpretation of Islam by Bangladeshi men and a section of little-learned religious leaders. This religious tradition is blended into a culture that legitimizes the exclusion of women from public spaces (Chowdhury, 2009; Halder, 2004). The general people of Bangladesh have a strong attachment to Islam, and nobody among the rulers and the ruled would risk vengeance on rivals by criticizing religious norms, practices, and beliefs. A large number of Bangladeshis do not carry out the obligatory religious practices, but the majority show their dedication to Islam publicly. Government declarations are often splashed with references to the formation of Islamic morals, and politics is framed in such a way as not to agitate this delicate issue (Huque and Akhter, 1987).

The popular tradition portrays women as physically weak and intellectually inferior requiring continuous protection of the physically strong and intelligent men (Islam, 2000). Most of the norms and values that are related to the structure of Bangladeshi society are gendered and usually support masculinity directly or indirectly. This social system dominates the life of women and upholds a rigid division of labor that controls women's mobility, roles, and sexuality (Asian Development Bank, 2001).

Discrimination against women begins just after birth and goes on throughout life, leading to a denial of equal entry to many basic opportunities and rights. By custom, after the wedding, a girl resides at her husband's house. A large number of families consider their girls as a burden while sons are expected to earn and look after their parents. Sons are given preference in all areas, which includes giving the best food during meals and the most support in their education (Chowdhury, 2009; Jahan and Amundsen, 2012; Sultana, 2012).

Lack of freedom and mobility for girls is another major characteristic of patriarchy in Bangladesh. Women tend to be restricted from going to work or meeting with their friends, particularly after dark. Additionally, women face discrimination of inheritance or property rights. According to Islamic law, sisters are entitled to half of their brothers' share in the Muslim families of Bangladesh while Hindu women get nothing. Only Christian women get

the same share of the property. Furthermore, in most cases, women have no right to choose their husbands; rather the male members of their families make those decisions for them. A Muslim man is allowed to polygamy, divorce, a double share of an inheritance, and guardianship over wife and children. Unlike a woman, a Hindu or a Christian man in practice is able to abandon his wife and enter into another relationship, even though divorce is, according to their religion, discouraged. Under Islamic law, divorce is allowed for both men and women, but in practice, it is very difficult for a Muslim woman to get divorced when she wants it. The overall system damages women's self-esteem, confidence, and self-respect and destroys their ambitions (Cain *et al.*, 1979; Rouf, 2013; Rozario, 2004; Sultana, 2012).

Violence against women is widespread; patriarchal norms naturalize domestic violence. Men in Bangladesh beat their wives to express male superiority. A study finds that 47% of women in Bangladesh experience physical assault by husbands and men. Ameen states: "the village people are of the opinion that a man who does not beat his wife is spineless." Even in the urban areas husbands of many highly-educated women beat them (Ameen, 2005; Chowdhury, 2009; Sultana, 2012). Poverty often makes women's situation much more unbearable in material terms. However, poor and illiterate women are not necessarily more adversely affected by patriarchy than the middle and the upper-middle classes. In some ways, the physical constraints of patriarchy are more directly experienced by middle-class women. Due to the lack of any effective state-provided social security system, most women are ultimately dependent on the men of their families for support, and they cannot afford to alienate them (Rozario, 2004).

The socialization process in the family does not encourage women to take a leading role. Patriarchy reinforces women's dependency on men and men have strong reservations regarding women in leadership and management positions. Due to the patriarchal culture, Bangladeshi women have been conditioned not to take much interest in government and politics. Furthermore, women have been reluctant to run for parliament due to domestic responsibilities (Ahmed, 2008).

Although Bangladesh is a signatory and has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), it maintains reservations on the articles (2 & 16) concerning women's equal rights in the family and property, which is contentious and hampers gender equality. Gender discrimination and inequalities are deeply rooted in the socio-economic structures and are somewhat legitimated. At present, both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are women, but unfortunately, no other areas exhibit any noteworthy sign of women's development apart from a few symbolic positions for women. Islamic dogmas influence and nourish the conservative nature of the culture. The promotion of gender issues in Bangladesh has been viewed as a 'zero-sum game', where women's gains have been considered as men's defeats (Jahan, 1995), and progress that comes at the cost of tradition and religious fidelity, which are still highly valued in Bangladeshi society. Thus it can be said that Bangladesh is a patriarchal society.

3.7. Exploring the Reason of Resemblances: Is it Patriarchy?

Women in both Australia and Bangladesh are a victim of patriarchy. The participants identified several barriers to their way of participation in the electoral politics that are commonly associated with patriarchal societies. Domestic and reproductive roles of women; lack of access to the job market, property and finance; violence, harassment and insecurity; the aggressive nature of politics; lack of support by the political parties; the process of socialization of girls and boys; treatment of media towards women, all are direct or indirect outcomes of the male-dominated social and political system. All the female participants recognized patriarchy as one of the prime factors for the low participation of women in politics. However, it can be said that it is a complex issue as it can be traced back to a number of institutional, historical, socio-economic as well as cultural factors. Negative popular attitudes towards women's leadership are deep-rooted in the culture regarding the division of sex roles that are prevalent for many years.

The Australian federal government has adopted several strategies and programs for women's advancement in politics; the feminists and women's organizations are working to ensure gender parity in all sectors including politics. Nevertheless, due to the traditional gendered roles of homemakers and parenting, women are poorly represented in the job sector (where they are overrepresented in part-time jobs or low paid jobs) and in the decision-making bodies. Politics is designed and controlled by men; there is a lack of a women-friendly environment in the parliament and local government. Patriarchy prevails in all sectors of Australian society, although liberal views concerning gender equality are continually trying to erode this state of affairs and have made substantial inroads in politics, in the last 30 years in particular.

Meanwhile, in Bangladesh, a patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal social system continues to prevail, where the superior status of men is socially accepted as normal. Women are seen as subordinate to men and thus enjoy an inferior status. Such a system upholds a rigid division of labor that restricts women's outside movement and mostly confines them within households. Traditionally, a woman in Bangladesh is dependent on the male member of the family; father, husband or son. Men in the family are the chief decision-makers. Women, in most cases, are deprived of equal rights; they have less food, lower education, and are mostly engaged in informal jobs. Politics is almost exclusively a male domain despite the two major parties being led by women leaders. Patriarchy controls all sectors of society and impedes women from being involved in politics.

The liberalization of politics in Bangladesh is being achieved through a more forced, artificial structure via the quota system. The quota system is meant to drive more deep-seated change through demonstrating that women can occupy leadership positions, thereby inspiring more women to participate in politics and changing the attitudes of male politicians and the public generally towards women's political participation. However, reserved seats are not given much status, thereby undermining the demonstrative impact. The Bangladesh Election Commission ordered all

political parties to ensure at least 33% of all party positions including a candidate list for the election to fill by women. The political parties have largely ignored the instruction of the Election Commission regarding 33% incorporation of women. Now few women are nominated as candidates to the general seats of the parliament. Male politicians publicly criticize and make fun of the women MPs elected in the reserved seats. Patriarchy dominates all sectors of women's lives.

Women are still juggling to balance professional and family demands. Traditional values regarding gender roles are still prevalent in both Australia and Bangladesh. The role of women as mothers and wives and domestic responsibilities make their involvement and participation in the public sphere difficult. Patriarchy prevails in both countries and creates difficulties for their political participation. The difference is that in developed countries like Australia, the liberal attack on patriarchy is much stronger, much more public, and much more efficient. The barriers to political participation in general seats are not as acute in Australia as they are in Bangladesh, and Australian male politicians are more constrained in their capacity to openly discriminate against female members, whether regarding pre-selection or party positions.

4. Conclusion

Women politicians in Australia and Bangladesh face many similar barriers while some are dissimilar between the two countries. Women in Australia are enjoying a better status than women in Bangladesh that is the result of development. Although patriarchy prevails in both Australia and Bangladesh, women in Bangladesh are affected more due to patriarchy than women in Australia. It can be said that modernization has helped to remove many of the patriarchal restrictions on women and foster changes in peoples' attitudes regarding gender roles. However economic liberalization has not led automatically to liberalized attitudes in the socio-cultural sphere, particularly in the last bastions of patriarchal control such as the formal political arena.

In both countries women are lagging behind men in elected office and as political leaders. This suggests underlying patriarchy that transcends socio-cultural differences. It can be surmised from this that women in both countries are facing the traditional societal barrier of male-domination that shapes and restricts their political participation.

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